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Carl Bode

A Little Night-Rain Music

YOU WAKE UP gently, to the music of the September rain outside your window. It's washing the panes, murmuring helpfully as it does so. The luminous dial says 2.15. You can't hear even a whisper of traffic. Lulled by the rain you turn over and go back to sleep.

You. Not me. Not Henry Thoreau, 3d. I'm living the simple life in my vacation cottage on Point Discomfort just below Annapolis. I wake at 2.15 with — paradoxical as it sounds — a soggy start. The start is because of a thunder clap which has just shaken the cottage and notified me that it's raining double buckets. The soggy part is because the foot of my bed has become a marsh thanks to the fact that I haven't patched the tarpaper roof above it. Though I can see the rain trickle down only by the flashes of lightning, I can feel the marsh growing bigger.

I remind myself grimly that it doesn't matter. I have a

few little chores to do outside anyhow. Chores which, if I'd had as much forethought as a garden ant, I would have done last evening. So I scuff into one tennis shoe, feel under the bed for the other, hike my raincoat over my head, and plunge outside. Then I plunge right back. I've forgotten my flashlight. Outside again, with the flashlight shining feebly, I run to the rear of the cottage where the boxes of firewood are beginning to float. I shove them under the porch as I should have six hours ago.

Then, running again, I circle round the cottage to pick up the tools I've left out. Like a Wild West cowboy I gallop tall in the saddle, swooping each time I have to pick up an implement. Hammers and handsaws are easy; I snatch them up with damp aplomb. But screwdrivers squirm out of my grasp. The larger items have their own perils built in. Nobody can swoop, pick up a sharp axe, and live unbloodied to tell the tale at the Chessie Tavern.

Next I scurry down the twisting path to the boat house. The boat's safety cushions are probably being soaked, and the local wizard says they'll never float again once that happens. Also I ought to drag a tarp across the boat. So I scurry. But my circling flashlight is not a help but a menace. For when I shine it down on the path, tree branches and bushes lean over to whiplash me. When I shine it up above, rocks rise in the path to trip me. I grow more eloquent with every step. Who says an American can't swear more than a minute without repeating himself?

On my way back I detour to the north, where I snatch my sodden towels from the line, along with some undershirts and socks. Then I detour to the south. Something inside me, inspired by the Niagaras I've been navigating, suggests that I'd better visit the privy. I go in the little door and find that 77 mosquitos are waiting to puncture me in places both tender and indescribable here.

Back inside the cottage I do something any simpleton would have done in the first place: I pluck out the propsticks and shut the windows. I wave my flashlight around, see more leaks, and look for pans or pails to put under them. I move a row of books which are in danger of being engulfed. I shut the damper of the fireplace and get a shower of soot for my pains. Then finally, shucking my drenched rainwear, I crawl into bed. I turn over but I don't go back to sleep. For I've brought with me one, if only one, blood-hungry, persistent and cunning mosquito. We settle down to an hour of guerrilla warfare.

In the morning I'm going to take another look at Thoreau's cozening classic, "Walden." I'll bet he doesn't say a word about any of these rustic delights, from mosquitos to leaky tarpaper.

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